

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 STATE 239794

54

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CUSTOMS: MR. BANOWITZ (SUBS)

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 239794

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR,PGOV, LA, US

SUBJECT: NARCOTICS CONTROL PROGRAM: PROPOSED REDUCTION

CUSTOMS PERSONNEL

REFS: (A) VIENTIANE 6658 (B) STATE 228435 (C) STATE

160296 (D) AMBASSADOR TO MANN MEMO, SEPT 26,

1973, (E) VIENTIANE 7513 (F) STATE 101173

1. SUMMARY: CUSTOMS HAS REQUESTED EA INTER-AGENCY WORKING GROUP ON NARCOTICS CONTROL TO REVIEW EMBASSY PLAN TO REDUCE CAD NARCOTICS ADVISORY PERSONNEL FROM EIGHT TO FOUR BY END OF FY-74 (REF A) UNDER NARCOTICS CONTROL ACTION PLAN (NCAP). CUSTOMS BELIEVES REDUCTION OF ADVISORY PERSONNEL TO SIX BY END OF CY-73 WOULD BRING STAFF LEVEL TO ABSOLUTE MINIMUM REQUIRED FOR CONTINUED EFFECTIVE OPERATION IN LAOS. WORKING GROUP AWARE OF POLITICAL DESIRABILITY OF LOWERING, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, OFFICIAL PROFILE AND DEPARTMENT HAS EMPHASIZED THAT CURRENT STATE OF FLUX IN LAO POLITICAL SITUATION MAKES THIS PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TIME PERIOD. CUSTOMS AGREED TO REQUEST EMBASSY COMMENTS AND EVALUATION OF IMPACT POLITICAL CHANGES MAY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 STATE 239794

HAVE ON NARCOTICS CONTROL PROGRAM BEFORE FURTHER CONSIDERING

MATTER IN WORKING GROUP. POSSIBLE RENEWED CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC INTEREST IN NARCOTICS CONTROL EFFORTS IN LAOS FOLLOWING RELEASE OF CONGRESSMAN WOLFF'S REPORT MAKES EMBASSY'S ANALYSIS OF POST-PGNU EFFECTS ON PROGRAM NECESSARY AT THIS TIME. END SUMMARY.

2. AT NOVEMBER 29 MEETING OF EA INTER-AGENCY WORKING GROUP ON NARCOTICS CONTROL, CUSTOMS SERVICE EXPRESSED VIEW (REF B, NOT CLEARED WITH EA) THAT PROPOSED REDUCTION CUSTOMS ADVISORY TEAM TO FOUR POSITIONS BY END OF FY-74 WOULD SERIOUSLY REDUCE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAM IN LAOS, WITH ADVERSE LONG-RANGE EFFECT ON EA PROGRAM. CUSTOMS PROPOSES REDUCTION TEAM LEVEL TO SIX BY ABOLISHING LONG AND REIMERS POSITIONS BY END OF CY-73. CUSTOMS GAVE FOLLOWING REASONS FOR MAINTAINING STAFFING LEVEL AT SIX:

(A) SHARP INCREASE LAO CUSTOMS NARCOTICS SEIZURES, FROM 47 KILOS OPIUM DURING FIRST YEAR OF PROGRAM TO 169 KILOS SEIZED FIRST SEVEN MONTHS CY-73, INDICATES PROJECT JUST NOW ACHIEVING MOMENTUM TOWARD EFFECTIVE LAO CUSTOMS SERVICE. CONTINUED SEIZURES ALSO SUGGEST PROBLEM OF OPIUM TRANSIT THROUGH LAOS STILL EXISTS AND COULD EXPAND IF ENFORCEMENT RELAXED.

(B) CUSTOMS BELIEVES LAO CUSTOMS SERVICE WOULD NOT CONTINUE TO FUNCTION AS EFFECTIVE NARCOTICS INTERDICTION FORCE WITHOUT SUBSTANTIAL US CUSTOMS PRESENCE. CUSTOMS NOTED PERIPHREAL EFFECT OF INCREASED LAO CUSTOMS EFFICIENCY IS INCREASED REVENUES FOR RLG FROM DUTIES. DECREASE IN THESE REVENUES WOULD MAKE ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORTS LESS ATTRACTIVE TO RLG.

(C) REDUCTION OF TEAM TO FOUR WOULD LEAVE ONLY TWO ADVISORS FREE FOR SERVICE AT FOUR BORDER POSTS NOW MANNED, SINCE TWO ADVISORS SCHEDULED TO REMAIN IN VIENTIANE

(D) LAO PROJECT MUST BE CONSIDERED IN RELATION WITH STEPPED UP CONTROL EFFORTS IN THAILAND AND BURMA WHICH MAY FORCE NARCOTICS TRAFFIC BACK INTO LAOS, IF ENFORCEMENT IN LAOS WERE RELAXED.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 239794

APPRECIATE EMBASSY COMMENTS.

3. IN WORKING GROUP DISCUSSIONS, DEPT EMPHASIZED EMBASSY POSITION THAT DURING SENSITIVE PERIOD WHEN LAO PARTIES WORKING TOWARD REACHING POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, IT DESIRABLE TO MAINTAIN USG PRESENCE IN LAOS AT LOWEST POSSIBLE LEVEL WHILE MAINTAINING EFFECTIVENESS OF VARIOUS PROGRAMS.

WORKING GROUP ALSO CONCERNED WITH EFFECTS FORMATION OF PGNU WILL HAVE ON DRUG TRAFFICKING IN LAOS AND CONTINUED EFFECTIVE OPERATION OF CAD TEAM. IN ADDITION, CONTINUED FAVORABLE CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC ATTITUDE MAY RPT MAY BE MODIFIED BY RELEASE OF CONGRESSMAN WOLFF'S REPORT ON LAOS, WHICH REPORTEDLY MAY BE CRITICAL OF SOME ASPECTS OF LAO PROGRAM. (BETTER READING ON CONTENTS OF WOLFF REPORT

WILL FOLLOW SEPTTEL AFTER DEPOFFS DISCUSSIONS WITH WOLFF STAFF THIS WEEK OR NEXT). FINALLY, DEPT IN COOPERATION WITH AID/W PRESENTLY CONDUCTING FINAL REVIEW OF POST'S NCAP BUDGET (REF C) FOR SUBMISSION TO EA WORKING GROUP FOR APPROVAL.

4. IN LINE WITH SECRETARY'S DIRECTIVE THAT DEPT BE MORE FORTHCOMING IN PROVIDING GUIDANCE ON REPORTING DESIRED BY WASHINGTON, REQUEST EMBASSY GIVE ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE AND PROBABLE IMPACT FORMATION OF PGNU WILL HAVE ON ANTI-NARCOTICS PROGRAM IN LAOS. DEPT APPRECIATES TYPE REPORTING CONTAINED EXCELLENT MEMO (REF D) AND PARA F, REF E. WE APPRECIATE DIFFICULTY IN MAKING ANALYSIS DURING PRESENT PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY, BUT FEEL IT NECESSARY HAVE EMBASSY'S VIEWS AT THIS TIME IN ORDER DISCUSS AND MAKE DECISIONS ON LAOS PROGRAM. WE REALIZE THAT THIS PROBLEM HAS MANY RAMIFICATIONS AND THAT SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS MAY NOT BE ANSWERABLE AT THIS TIME. NEVERTHELESS THESE ARE POINTS WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE CLARIFIED:

(A) WHAT IS GENERAL ATTITUDE OF LPF TOWARDS NARCOTICS PROBLEM AND CONTROL? WHAT IS EXTENT OF PRODUCTION, TRAFFICKING AND USAGE IN LPF ZONE? WHAT WILL BE EFFECTS OF INCREASED INTERCOURSE BETWEEN TWO ZONES?

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 STATE 239794

(B) IN EMBASSY VIEW, WHAT WILL BE LPF POSITION TOWARD US ADVISORS AND OTHER NARCOTICS-RELATED PERSONNEL IN LAOS? SPECIFICALLY, WOULD APPRECIATE AMPLIFICATION OF EFFECTS ON FIELD OPERATIONS REPORTED PARA 2, REF A, PARTICULARLY ON POSSIBLE EFFECTS FOLLOWING ACTIVATION OF JCIA MOBILE UNITS.

(C) WILL PROVISIONS PROTOCOL ARTICLE 10, B CONCERNING JOINT POLICE FORCE AUTHORITY TO CHECK ON "TRAVEL OF FOREIGNERS" AND "AIRPORTS" AFFECT ACTIVITIES CAD OPERATIONS IN VIENTIANE AND LUANG PRABANG?

5. DEPT BELIEVES ANSWERS TO THESE AND OTHER QUESTIONS RELATED TO POST-PGNU NARCOTICS CONTROL EFFORTS WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL IN ONGOING DISCUSSIONS IN WASHINGTON. WE

APPRECIATIVE OF EMBASSY REPORTING ON THIS SUBJECT AND
REITERATE CONCURRENCE IN PRESIDENT'S SENTIMENTS TRANS-
MITTED REF F. KISSINGER

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